

The Road Ahead

TPEAC's accomplishments over the past five years have improved transportation project permitting and established shared knowledge and trust among stakeholders. This has served the system of transportation project-delivery well, from small routine maintenance-oriented projects to large complex "mega" projects.

These accomplishments have brought more efficient and effective use of public resources and benefits for transportation and the environment. The work of TPEAC is not done however. There is still much to do.

There is a continuing need to maintain effective and productive working relationships, commit to the use of best practices and tools, and to expand and improve upon the work and accomplishments of TPEAC.

The Office of Regulatory Assistance is poised to incorporate TPEAC's programs and ideas into larger, statewide efforts as part of the

Governor's Regulatory Improvement Program. The Office of Regulatory Assistance and the agencies of TPEAC will commit to continuing to provide the leadership, support, and direction necessary to:

- Improve mitigation approaches including speeding up approvals of mitigation banks
- Develop and extend multi-agency programmatic permits
- Implement watershed-based mitigation tools and strategies
- Develop performance measures for regulatory work
- Expand and improve web-based permitting tools and information
- Develop and implement a NEPA consultation with Native American tribes
- Reduce duplication between permits issued by different agencies
- Integrate and align planning and permitting
- Implement coordinated permitting tools and strategies, including the use of Multi-Agency Permit (MAP) Teams and Interdisciplinary Project Teams

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For more information, please see:
<http://www.ora.wa.gov/spotlight-series/tpeac>



US 12 - Walla Walla: TPEAC toured this project and discussed alternative mitigation approaches.

Washington State Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee: 2001-2006

Five Years of Permit Partnerships

The Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee (TPEAC) was established by the Washington State Legislature to improve the permitting processes for transportation projects while achieving better environmental outcomes. The TPEAC legislation required agencies to work together to address the many environmental challenges associated with transportation project delivery in Washington.

The results:

- Increased trust and credibility among stakeholders
- Valuable transportation permitting tools and processes
- Demonstrated permit streamlining successes

TPEAC provided a valuable forum for collaborative efforts to improve Washington State's transportation permitting process. The Committee served to build shared knowledge, trust and respect among its participants. These relationships, combined with the implementation of TPEAC tools and processes, will have a lasting impact on the regulatory environment in Washington.



Example of traditional on-site mitigation at SR 500 Andreson Rd. Interchange that provides minimal environmental benefit.

TPEAC's Charge

Washington, like every other state in the nation, faces a significant challenge: improving transportation systems while protecting the environment. To achieve both, stakeholders must navigate an increasingly complex federal, state, local and tribal permitting process.

To coordinate and streamline the environmental permitting process for transportation projects in Washington, the State Legislature passed the Environmental Permit Streamlining Act (ESB 6188) in 2001, creating TPEAC. In March 2003, the Legislature reauthorized the Environmental Permit Streamlining Act, extending TPEAC's mission (through March 2006).



Example of a potential watershed-based mitigation site studied by TPEAC Watershed Subcommittee, for the SR 167 project that meets watershed goals and maximizes environmental benefits.

Partnerships in Permitting

TPEAC brought together state legislators, representatives from state and local agencies, tribes, business associations, the construction industry, and environmental and labor interests. In addition, TPEAC established several technical subcommittees to address permit reform topics specified in the TPEAC legislation. The subcommittees raised awareness, evaluated the existing permit process, and developed solutions for permit streamlining. Working together and sharing perspectives allowed the subcommittees to better understand the complexities of permitting and coordinating issues involved in the successful delivery of transportation projects.

TPEAC Products, Tools and Accomplishments

TPEAC and its five subcommittees produced important tools to improve the permitting process, including:

- Multi-agency web tools to coordinate and improve permitting
- Multi-agency programmatic agreements that reduce the cost and time needed to permit routine projects and activities
- A Multi-agency Permit (MAP) Team to enhance coordination between agencies
- Watershed characterization tools that change the way mitigation sites are selected
- Improvements to local government permitting with emphasis on permitting maintenance activities
- Better permit compliance for construction projects
- More training opportunities for WSDOT and partners
- Better communication with tribes

TPEAC Products and Related Transportation Tools

Transportation projects range in complexity and frequency from routine maintenance work to large, “mega” projects, with the majority falling somewhere in between. TPEAC and its subcommittees developed a variety of permitting tools and strategies for transportation projects across this spectrum (see figure 1 below).

Permitting Process Improvements:

Seek to change how agencies and regulated entities approach environmental permitting for transportation projects (left side of figure below).

Coordinated Permitting Tools:

Aim to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing regulatory system (right side of figure below).

Tribal Participation in TPEAC

TPEAC funded liasons (Upper Columbia Unified Tribes, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, and Columbia River Intertribal Fisheries Commission) to facilitate tribal involvement in the transportation permitting improvement process.

The TPEAC tribal liaisons:

- Communicated to the tribes activities of TPEAC and brought tribal comments back to the TPEAC forum
- Stressed the importance of early and consistent tribal consultation as a crucial step for transportation planning, construction, and maintenance activities
- Emphasized the need to partner for salmon recovery
- Assisted the WSDOT tribal liaisons to develop a model NEPA Tribal Consultation Process
- Participated on various TPEAC subcommittees, most notably the Watershed Subcommittee, to ensure that tribal interests and needs were included

TPEAC Technical Subcommittees & Task Forces



SR 539 crossing Fish Trap Creek

COMPLIANCE, TRAINING, AND REPORTING SUBCOMMITTEE

This subcommittee looked at ways to improve permit compliance.

Accomplishments include:

- Creating a compliance tracking system
- Improving agency notification process to provide timelier responses to violations
- Training over 2,000 WSDOT staff members in areas of environmental regulations, permits, and compliance

PROGRAMMATIC PERMITS SUBCOMMITTEE

This subcommittee developed permits for routine transportation maintenance and construction activities. A programmatic permit is best suited for simple or repeated activities.

Accomplishments include developing programmatic permits for:

- Bridge and Ferry Terminal Structure Washing
- Bridge and Ferry Terminal Painting
- Bridge Structure Repair
- Channel Maintenance
- Fish Way Maintenance
- Culvert Maintenance
- Culvert Replacement in Non Fish Bearing Streams
- Bridge Deck and Drain Cleaning
- Bridge and Ferry Terminal Deck Overlay and Replacement
- Pile Replacement in Marine Waters

PERMIT DELIVERY SUBCOMMITTEE

This subcommittee worked to improve the transportation project environmental review and permit decision-making processes among federal, state, and local governments. It provided WSDOT with several new tools and innovative approaches for environmental permitting.

Accomplishments include:

- Developing multi-agency web-based permitting tools
- Pioneering the use of Interdisciplinary Project Teams (IPTs) to coordinate permits on two pilot mega-projects
- Selecting ten pilot projects for WSDOT to draft permit terms and conditions for resource agency review and approval
- Studying ways to reduce duplication among permitting processes

WATERSHED MITIGATION SUBCOMMITTEE

This subcommittee developed new concepts and a set of technical tools for watershed-based environmental mitigation.

Accomplishments include:

- Developing a Watershed Characterization Methodology to maximize environmental mitigation
- Developing a Mitigation Screening Tool to identify those transportation projects that are likely to benefit from alternative approaches
- Testing the use of an Integrated Mitigation Policy Guidance that can help WSDOT and resource agencies to work more efficiently to process permits and provide more effective mitigation
- Creating a set of directions for integrating watershed tools and processes into existing policies and procedures

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASK FORCE

TPEAC directed a task force to evaluate transportation permitting problems on the local level. The task force found that local government permitting played only a small role in transportation project construction delays.

The taskforce identified several opportunities to improve local permitting of maintenance projects including:

- Creating a streamlined process for the permitting of maintenance activities under the Shoreline Management Act
- Developing a nighttime noise programmatic permit for WSDOT in the city of Renton



Programmatic permits cover activities such as the need for pile replacement.

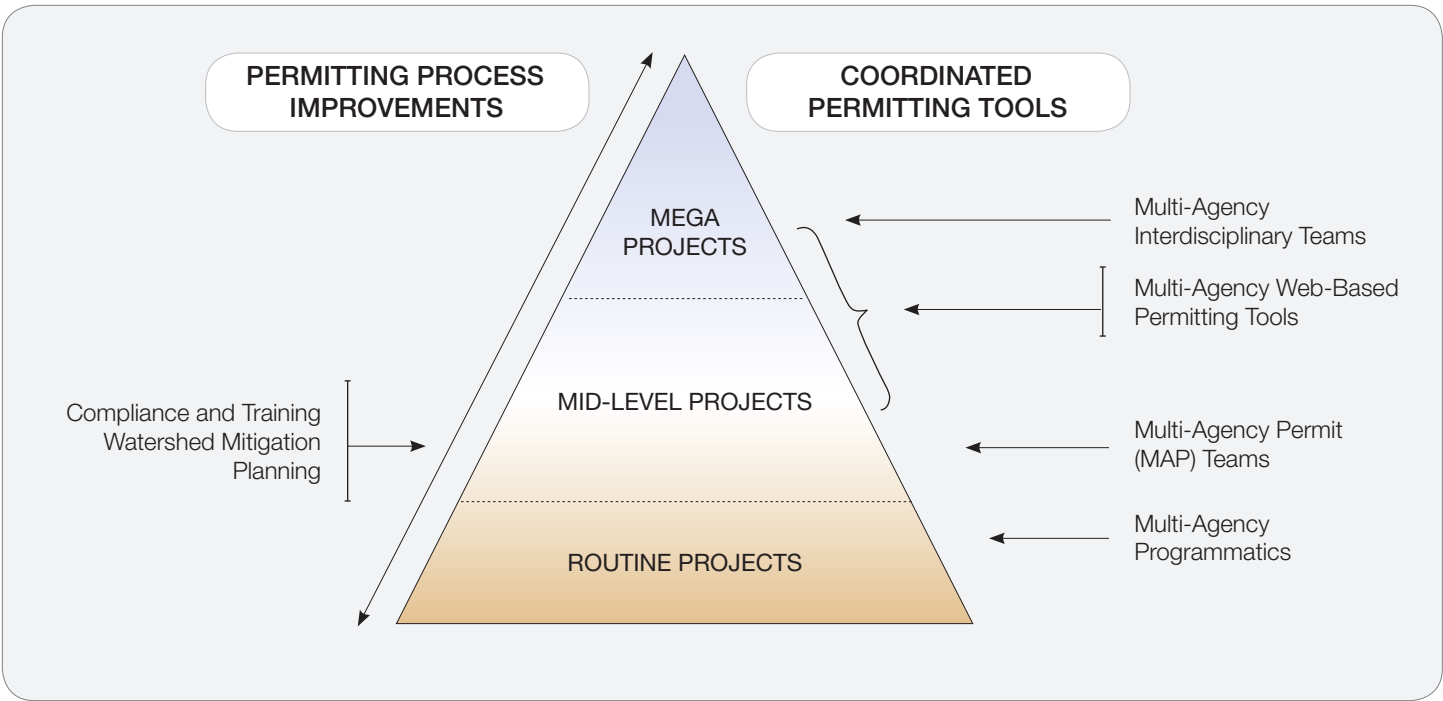


Figure 1. TPEAC Products and Related Transportation Tools Diagram